

**ARKANSAS COMMISSION FOR COORDINATION  
OF EDUCATIONAL EFFORTS  
2013 ANNUAL REPORT**

The Commission for the Coordination of Educational Efforts was created by Act 109 of the Second Extraordinary Session of 2003. Act 109 required the Commission to recommend policies related to the improvement of coordination among and between the levels of education from pre-kindergarten to the graduate level, and included a specific list of topics for consideration. Subsequent legislation has adjusted the size and composition of the board but retained the initial purpose. The original topics and legislative history are provided for reference in Appendix A to this report.

For a decade the Commission for Coordination has met quarterly, listened to many distinguished speakers from government, education, and the private sector and annually provided a report with recommendations for change and attention. A partial list of past presentations is also provided for reference in Appendix A.

In the past ten years many things have changed that affect education and jobs in Arkansas and the efforts that coordinate and link them. Some of these are executive acts, such as Governor Beebe's use of his Workforce Cabinet to bring together department and agency chairs involved in education and workforce issues, and the STEM Works effort that works to promote STEM education leading to a workforce empowered for the knowledge-based jobs of the 21<sup>st</sup> Century. STEM Works includes UTeach programs at three universities that will improve the availability of teachers skilled in STEM disciplines and three project-based learning initiatives – Project Lead the Way, New Tech, EAST Core. The Governor's economic program has emphasized growth in skilled, higher paying jobs and the infrastructure to support technology based startups and increase venture capital. Another major legislative act was the creation of the lottery based scholarships.

There are also large efforts driven primarily by specific agencies, such as the advent of the Common Core Curriculum and Arkansas' role in developing the Next Generation Science Standards. These efforts affect the entire educational enterprise.

New organizations have also emerged focused on the vision of Arkansas in the 21<sup>st</sup> Century. Accelerate Arkansas focuses on the broad changes in education and the

economy required to get the average income in Arkansas to equal the US average. The Arkansas STEM Coalition focuses on engaging the educational enterprise, state agencies, businesses and citizens to remake Arkansas STEM policies, strategies and programs in order to expand the economy of Arkansas and produce higher paying jobs. There are programs to remediate, reduce the need for remediation, increase the success, extent and diversity of AP courses, and other programs for concurrent enrollment and distance education. Other programs encourage students to visit college campuses and employers, to gain information for planning their lives.

In the past few years, the Commission has heard reports from all these groups and others. In 2013, the Commission engaged in review of past efforts, reflected upon the original charge given the Commission, and worked on a framework to guide future systematic looks at what parts of the overall system are working well and what aspects need further attention. Also, what initiatives need to be taken to scale and where are the gaps that need to be addressed?

In addition to the internal review process, the Commission attended the November “Partnering for Progress” Conference held at UCA. This conference focused on retention, one of the original and current concerns of the Commission.

The Commission began the review and planning process by collecting current educational concerns from the membership. To link the present with the past of the Commission, member Herschel Cleveland reviewed the concerns that led to the creation of the Commission. He is in a unique position to do this since he is a current member of the Commission and he was the state legislator who proposed the initial legislation. Then Commission member Steve Sparks, and the Arkansas Economic Development Commission staff provided assistance and facilitation to organize the current concerns and relate them to the charges in the legislation. This process led the Commission to understand that current concerns fell under four broad, and interrelated, headings: Bridges to the Workforce, Curriculum and Infrastructure, Innovation and Continuing Change, and Investments.

**Bridges to the Workforce** involve programs and partnerships that take away the wall between education and life outside the classroom – helping raise the awareness of students, teachers, parents and community concerning the skills required for 21<sup>st</sup> century jobs and the opportunities offered by those jobs, involving students and teachers in community based learning, engaging business in support of education. This category includes many existing efforts and may require both innovation and taking things to scale.

**Curriculum and Infrastructure** concerns what is taught, how it is taught, how evaluations are done and how teachers are prepared for change. These areas of concern include initiatives in process, such as taking the STEM Works project-based learning programs to scale and further implementation of the Core Curriculum and Next Generation Science Standards. Commission concerns also exist about how to move STEM Works and related initiatives into the elementary schools. This involves teacher preparation and certification, facilities for hands on experiences, and choice of materials and resources. Curriculum and Infrastructure also includes the need to advocate and plan for increased access to bandwidth, as well as more effective teacher training and involvement in planning, so teachers become agents for change, rather than feeling ignored. This category could also include issues of delivery – what is face-to-face, what is online, what is off site? New examples of on-line delivery are emerging, such as the efforts of the Arkansas School for Mathematics, Sciences and the Arts to reach non-residential students and the University of Arkansas at Fayetteville College of Engineering plan to offer core engineering courses online at two year institutions. Other methods such as Massively Open Online Courses (MOOCs) may also need consideration.

**Innovation and Continuing Change** – These concerns obviously include issues from the other headings, but that is not the end of possible innovation. The structure of education is changing, what is done in and outside the classroom is changing, and may change more. Technology is now pervasive and changes rapidly. Keeping up with these changes in educational organization, teacher training and infrastructure will be a large issue. Innovation also means looking outside the box. How do we value education and what do we expect of the educational system? Should we look at educational systems in other countries? How sacred is the organization of the school and year? Should age based grades be replaced or supplemented by individual learning plans, tests for mastery, projects across age levels? What is the role of high stakes tests versus test for diagnosis and mastery? Is the system degree focused, certificate focused, skill focused, or some combination? How do work and higher education either work together or offer conflicting demands on students who are also employees? What should Arkansas education look like in the years to come?

**Investments** - Funding education is complex, involving federal, state, local, and family budgets. Tuition used to be lower when the state paid a higher proportion of university costs. Scholarships now help fill the gap, but students accumulate large debts. Money concerns drive students to drop out or select majors perceived to offer easier paths to scholarship retention. Is there a better system, can

education cost less through innovation? Should how scholarships are awarded be changed, perhaps making them harder to get. Should loans be given only after careful counseling about ability to complete work and repay. How might tuition reimbursement or better planning of career and education overlap help? How much needs to go into technology, teacher preparation and professional development? How might teachers participate in internships? What is the basic economic model for education? Does property value go up with an educated citizenry or does personal income?

The Commission plans to work in these four areas in 2014, seeking to define specific actions that should be recommended in the future. The focus of the first meeting will be on Curriculum and Infrastructure, including one area of special concern that the Commission identified at the final meeting of 2013 –the impact of computers and related technologies at all levels. This includes the need for all teachers to be literate in every growing and changing technologies, issues of teaching technologies as tools in cross disciplinary environments, integrated use of computers and databases in classes, teaching of computer programming, office applications, and advanced computer science courses. There are related issues of teacher development, cost of hardware and broadband, computer science coursework and graduation requirements, and certification of teachers in computer science and technology. The Commission plans to coordinate with and hear from others that are working on these areas, beginning with a January meeting convened by the Arkansas STEM Coalition, and including computer science department chairs, representatives of computer science teachers, information technology industry representatives and others.

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**Appendix A: Background and History**

The Commission for the Coordination of Educational Efforts was created by Act 109 of the Second Extraordinary Session of 2003 in response to a perceived need for coordinated efforts to address problems with the flow of students from K-12 educational institutions to institutions of higher education and ultimately to the workforce. One major example of an issue requiring coordinated attention was the high rate of remediation required in students entering the institutions of higher education.

The Act required the appointment of members by the Governor, President Pro Tempore, Speaker of the House, the Presidents Council of Colleges and Universities, and by virtue of positions. Act 109 required the Commission to recommend policies related to the improvement of coordination among and between the levels of education from pre-kindergarten to the graduate level as well as:

- Recommend policies on concurrent enrollment of high school students in college courses.
- Make recommendations related to a common calendar for all public schools and institutions of higher education.
- Study the various delivery systems of distance learning and recommend ways to improve and make more efficient a delivery system for Arkansas.
- Recommend ways that the public schools, the Department of Education, the Department of Higher Education, and the institutions of higher education can improve working relationships in order to improve the effectiveness of teaching for the public schools.
- Recommend ways of improving the transfer of credit from institution to institution for the benefit of the student. This includes recommendations for improving the transfer from two-year to four-year institutions as well as the transfer among two-year institutions and four-year institutions.
- Make recommendations related to aligning the curriculum from kindergarten through the bachelor's level in colleges and universities.
- Recommend ways of improving the link between educational efforts and economic development for Arkansas.
- Recommend priorities for the funding of education.

- Review all current scholarship programs of the state and institutions of higher education and make recommendations for improving future scholarship programs.
- Make recommendations related to the future need for remediation of first-time college students.
- Make recommendations to improve science, technology, engineering, and mathematics education from kindergarten through the bachelor's level in higher education.
- Make recommendations to improve the use of educational technology.
- Recommend any other improvements in education at any level to benefit students and the state.

Act 1936 of 2005 amended Act 109 by adding the President of the Arkansas Science & Technology Authority and the Executive Chief Information Officer as members. Act 1936 also added duties concerning science and technology, as listed above.

Act 751 of 2007 dissolved and transferred the duties of the Executive Chief Information Officer to the Department of Information Systems. Therefore, the Director of the Department of Information Systems replaced the Chief Information Officer as a member of the Commission.

The first meeting of the Arkansas Commission for Coordination of Educational Efforts was held on August 12, 2004 where Dr. Ken James, then Commissioner of the Department of Education, and Dr. Linda Beene, then Director of the Department of Higher Education, presented an explanation of the commission, the reason for its creation and desired outcomes. Florine Milligan, Arkansas State University Trustee member, was elected Chair of the Commission at its November 2005 meeting, a position she diligently continued to fill through 2013.

The Commission has met quarterly since August 2004 to gather information. Presentations and information presented to the Commission include:

- Tara Smith, former director of financial aid at the Department of Higher Education, provided information about different scholarship programs;
- Beverly Williams formerly from the Department of Education gave the Commission information about teacher recruitment and retention;
- Steve Sparks from the Arkansas Economic Development Commission gave a presentation to the Commission about links between education and economic development;
- Dr. Jim Purcell, former director of the Department of Higher Education, and Dr. Ken James, former commissioner of the Department of Education, presented the findings of the Legislative Task Force on Higher Education Remediation, Retention, and Graduation Rates;
- Tara Smith addressed the Commission on recruitment and training of qualified math and science instructors;

- Dr. Suzanne Mitchell from the Department of Higher Education described various professional development opportunities for math and science teachers;
- Dr. Karen Wheeler formerly from the Department of Higher Education indicated the different tactics the Department is using to increase the number of college graduates in math and science areas;
- Ann Biggers, the gifted and talented administrator at the Department of Education, described the International Baccalaureate program in Arkansas and compared it with the Advanced Placement program;
- Jim Boardman, assistant director for research and technology at the Department of Education, addressed the tracking of students from kindergarten through college graduation;
- Dr. Jim Purcell informed the Commission about the changes in scholarships based on new legislation and the new lottery. He also spoke about President Obama's new American Graduation Initiative;
- Dr. Charity Smith, assistant commissioner for Academic Accountability at the Department of Education, presented information about data and tracking of students in kindergarten through high school graduation;
- Dr. Neal Gibson from the Arkansas Research Center and the Department of Education spoke to the Commission about student growth and data visualization. The Department of Education received a grant to develop a statewide longitudinal data system;
- Tonya Russell, director of the Division of Child Care and Early Childhood Education at the Department of Human Services, reported activities by the Department of Human Services that encourage parental involvement, especially at the early childhood level;
- Dr. Jim Purcell presented information about Complete College America, a new initiative designed to identify and target college graduation goals. He also described the scholarships available and reported on the Department of Higher Education's process of awarding those scholarships;
- Jim Boardman presented the Commission with information about the data grant of \$9.8 million from the U.S. Department of Education to the Department of Education;
- Dr. Tom Kimbrell, commissioner of the Department of Education, updated the Commission on the Common Core State Standards for Readiness for College and Career. This is an effort of most states to adopt common standards in English, language arts, and mathematics education;
- William Walker, director of the Department of Career Education, spoke to the Commission on the duties of that department;
- Dr. Ed Franklin, executive director of the Arkansas Association of Two-Year Colleges, spoke to the Commission about the Center for Student Success;
- Shane Broadway, interim director of the Department of Higher Education, gave a legislative update;
- Dr. John Ahlen from the Arkansas Science and Technology Authority and Susan Harriman from the Department of Education updated the Commission on STEM education and the U-Teach program;
- Dr. Kimbrell spoke to the group about the Common Core standards and STEM works;
- Melinda Faubel from AT&T described some ways Arkansas businesses are promoting education through grants and other incentives;

- Dr. Bob Gunter from the Arkansas Department of Career Education updated the Commission on the activities of the department;
- Melissa Jacks from the educator licensure division at the Department of Education spoke about possible changes to teacher licensure regulations;
- Luke Gordy, executive director of the Arkansans for Education Reform Foundation, described the Foundation's work;
- Herschel Cleveland, a former state representative and sponsor of legislation creating the Commission, described the origin and history of the Commission; and
- Megan Witonski, assistant commissioner in the Division of Learning Services at the Arkansas Department of Education, spoke about the Common Core Standards being implemented.

Each year the recommendations of the Commission were provided to the Governor, the Senate and House Committees on Education, the State Board of Education, the Arkansas Higher Education Coordinating Board, the boards of trustees of public institutions of higher education, and superintendents of Arkansas public schools in the December Annual Report as required by Act 109 of the Second Extraordinary Session of 2003.

John Chamberlin, representing the private sector, was elected chair of the Commission at its March 2013 meeting.